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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 002818

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/10/2016

TAGS: MOPS PREL PTER SO SU DJ ER ET

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: DEPUTY FM TALKS ON ERITREA INCURSION,  
SOMALIA CONTACT GROUP

Classified By: CHARGE VICKI HUDDLESTON FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) Summary. Deputy Foreign Minister Tekeda Alemu told Charge and United Kingdom Ambassador Bob Dewar October 18 that he had "absolutely no concern" about Eritrea's incursion into the TSZ and Ethiopia would not be provoked into action. He said that Ethiopia will continue to monitor the border, but no immediate action or response from Ethiopia was imminent. Tekeda said that Ethiopia's major threat comes from the East (Somalia) and not from the North (Eritrea). He added that in terms of Somalia, the US and UK must press the Somalia Contact Group (SCG) to recommend an amendment of the arms embargo and support of an IGASOM/Ugandan force. Tekeda stressed that the international community should use the SCG to convey its support of the Transitional Federal Government (TFG) to the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC). Tekeda said that Somaliland and Puntland were important to Ethiopia's national security and the overall success of the TFG. He noted that Sudan and Djibouti were potentially playing adversarial roles with respect to Ethiopia's conflict with the CIC. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Charge and the UK Ambassador Bob Dewar met October 1 at the request of Deputy Foreign Minister Tekeda Alemu and Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director of Europe and North America Almaz Amha. Charge's special assistant was notetaker.

ERITREAN INCURSION INTO THE TSZ

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¶3. (C) Deputy Foreign Minister Tekeda said that Eritrea's October 16 incursion into the TSZ was no cause for concern and added that the TSZ was "fiction" anyway since the Eritrean military, disguised as local militia, has been in the security zone for a while. Tekeda said that Ethiopia would not be provoked by this action, but would continue to vigilant and monitor the situation closely. Tekeda posited that Eritrea might have two motivations for their military movement. First, he said, Eritrea might be sending a message of support to the CIC and open up the possibility of a two front conflict for Ethiopia. Tekeda added that Eritrea's other reason for moving into the TSZ was to "remind" the international community of the unresolved border dispute with Ethiopia.

¶4. (C) Charge commended Ethiopia's restraint and asked Tekeda what he thought of the future of United Nations Mission to Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE). Tekeda said that restraint has always been Ethiopia's policy and that it has no interest in resuming a military conflict with Eritrea. As for UNMEE,

Tekeda supports its role and would not like to see any change to its mandate or capability to monitor the border. Tekeda questioned the sustainability of the Algiers Agreement, on the other hand, as Eritrea was now in violation of the agreement's provisions. He said that Ethiopia would look into the legal implications of Eritrea's movement into the TSZ and suggested that the US and UK do the same. Both the

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Charge and UK Ambassador argued that it was important to conserve the agreement as it calls upon the international community to see that the agreement is observed.

SOMALIA

¶ 15. (C) Tekeda told the Charge that Ethiopia views that outcome of the contact group's meeting as critical to peace in the region. He called the SCG to make a strong statement reflective of the international commitment to the TFG and recommend a partial lifting of the arms embargo. Tekeda said that such a statement would provide a psychological and political boost to the TFG in addition to increasing its security profile. Tekeda also said that bolstering the TFG would permit talks and the broadening of the TFG to accommodate moderate elements in the CIC. Charge asked if a statement from the contact group would allow Ethiopia to continue its support -- without direct confrontation with the CIC -- of TFG. Tekeda said that with the partial lifting of the embargo and an IGASOM/Ugandan battalion to do training would change the equation to the region. Tekeda said he would like to move away from the perception that it's just Ethiopia opposing the CIC and protecting TFG, Puntland and Somaliland. According to Tekeda representatives from the CIC have told him that Ethiopia alone prevented them from taking all of Somalia. He stressed that it should be countries in the region and the international community that stop the CIC

ADDIS ABAB 00002818 002 OF 002

from swallowing up Somalia; not Ethiopia alone.

¶ 16. (C) Tekeda noted that his government has continued to dialog with the CIC. For example, the Ethiopia Foreign Minister sent a representative to talk with two businessmen from the CIC. The GOE also sent a political officer to the Nairobi talks where both sides agreed the talks needed to happen at a higher level. Tekeda said the GOE extended an open invitation to Sheikh Sherif for talks in Addis, but has yet to receive a reply. He reiterated that the Ethiopian government has an "open door policy" towards the CIC. Tekeda noted, however, that the CIC does not take the dialog seriously and that after every major meeting, the CIC has made a military move.

¶ 17. (C) Charge asked about the commitment of other countries in the region to addressing the Somalia situation. Tekeda said that the African Union, Kenyans, and Ugandans were committed to dealing with the situation. He noted that during the Presidential meeting on Ivory Coast in Addis Ababa, Ugandan President Museveni told the Djiboutian Foreign Minister that any Islamic Jihad would be met with an "African Jihad." Tekeda also said that TFG President Yusef is close to Libyan President Qaddafi and then Libya may be ready to "play ball" in defense of the TFG.

SOMALILAND

¶ 18. UK Ambassador Bob Dewar that the Somaliland government was reticent to dialog with the TFG and expressed concern that it could be overturned by subversion. Tekeda said that Somaliland's stability is closely tied to Ethiopia's security. He explained that while Ethiopia would not take a calculated step to support Somaliland independence, it would do all that was necessary to ensure Somaliland's stability. Tekeda said that the US could be helpful by getting the

Somaliland opposition and government dialogue started and exploring the idea of getting Somaliland, Puntland and the TFG together for talks between themselves and with the other countries in the region.

¶9. Tekeda said that Ethiopia, the US and UK need to work together in Somaliland and asked Ambassador Dewar and the Charge if they were interested in coordinating visits to Hargeisa. Charge said that the US might be interested in joining the UK trip.

SUDAN

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¶10. (C) Tekeda said Sudan is playing a complex role in Somalia. He added that high level Sudanese government officials, including Ali Nafer, have made trips to Mogadishu. He openly questioned if there was a relationship between the Sudanese agreement brokered by Eritrea on the Eastern front celebrated this weekend and Eritrea's move into the TFG.

DJIBOUTI

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¶11. (C) Tekeda said that if Ethiopia were to follow Djibouti's policy regarding Somalia, the TFG would "already be gone." He added that Djibouti was "talking a good game" and does not have the courage to "show their cards." He said he was concerned about on-going talks between Djibouti and Eritrea. Tekeda said that Prime Minister Meles met with the Djiboutian FM and told him that he know about flights to Eritrea from Djibouti and financing for the CIC from Djibouti. Tekeda explained that Ethiopia would protect Djibouti, even if it needed to protect "Djibouti from itself" because the country is critical to Ethiopia's national security. Tekeda said that he hoped the Islamist factor would not be the most decisive in the Djiboutian decision-making process.

HUDDLESTON